

# Christian Zionism And Messianic Judaism

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One of the most grotesque aspects of the sociology of modern American protestantism is the phenomenon of Christian Zionism. While related to the theology of [Dispensationalism](#), Christian Zionism is actually something altogether different theologically. The purpose of this essay is to explore this movement, and in particular to point out its grievously heretical theoretical basis. To facilitate discussion, we shall interact with the expressed beliefs of a Christian Zionist, [Jerry Falwell](#). We close with a brief note on Messianic Judaism.

Zionism is a political movement built on the belief that the Jewish people deserve by right to possess the land of Palestine as their own. During the last part of the 19th and first part of the 20th centuries, Zionism gained support throughout the Christian West. This was due to two factors: the influence that Jewish wealth could purchase among politicians, and the emotional support that the history of Jewish tribulation could elicit from a Christianized public conscience. 1 With this support, Zionist guerrillas succeeded in throwing Palestine into havoc during the late 1940s, and eventually took over that land. The result was the disenfranchisement of the people who had historically dwelt there. The Moslem Palestinians were formally disenfranchised, and the Palestinian Jews were effectively disenfranchised as a result of being swamped by larger numbers of European Jews who immigrated to the new State of Israel.

It is important to realize that the most conservative Jews were anti-Zionists, believing that Palestine was not to become a Jewish land until made so by the coming of the Messiah. (This viewpoint was dramatized in the recent and rewarding film, *The Chosen*.) Much of the most severe criticism of the political Zionist movement has come from anti-Zionist Jews, the most noted being Alfred M. Lilienthal. Spurious criticisms of Zionism abound on the right. I have no wish to be associated with these, and so at the outset I want to critique them before dealing with the heresy of Christian Zionism. First of all, we hear from some rightist sources that it is a myth that 6,000,000 Jews were slaughtered by the National Socialists. It is argued that there were not that many Jews in Europe, that it would be impossible logistically to do away with that many people

given the time and facilities that the Nazis had, and so forth. This may be true; I have absolutely no way of knowing. The argument, however, seems to be that virtually no Jews were slaughtered by Nazis, and this is nonsense. Even if the number is 600,000 rather than six million, the event is still a moral horror of astonishing magnitude. Even if only one man were killed simply because he was a Jew, this would be a moral horror. And there can be no doubt but that many, many Jews were slaughtered. Of course, a blasphemous theology has been erected upon this in some Jewish circles, which is the notion that the Nazi persecutions fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 53, and that the Jews suffered for the sins of the world. As Christians we can only abominate such a construction, and we must call it what it is: a Satanic lie. Still, it is not necessary to deny the event itself in order to argue against an evil theological construction put upon the event. Perhaps more common is the assertion that most modern Jews are not Jews at all: They are Khazars. The Khazari race seems to lie behind the Ashkenazik Jews of Eastern Europe. This kind of assertion can, of course, be debated. The real problem in the discussion is the notion that Jewishness is a blood or racial phenomenon. It is not. Biblically speaking, a Jew is someone who is covenanted into the people of the Jews by circumcision, for better or for worse. When Abraham was commanded to circumcise, he was told to circumcise his entire household, including his 318 fighting men and his other domestic servants ([Gen. 14:14](#); [17:10-14](#)). Competent scholars imagine that Sheik Abraham's household probably included at the very least 3000 persons. These servants multiplied as the years went by, and Jacob inherited them all ([Gen. 27:37](#)). Although only 70 from the loins of Jacob went down into Egypt, so many servants went along that they had to be given the whole land of Goshen in which to live. All these people were Jews, but only a small fraction actually had any of Abraham's blood in them. Later on we see many other people joining the Jews; indeed, the lists of David's men include many foreigners, of whom Uriah the Hittite is but the best known. What this demonstrates is that covenant, not race, has always been the defining mark of a Jew (as it also is of a Christian). Genealogical records were kept for the immediate family, of course, since the Messiah had to be of the actual blood of Abraham, and later of David; but this could not have applied to more than a fraction of the total number of people. Thus, the Jews are those who claim to be Jews, who are covenanted with the Jews. The Khazari converted to Judaism in the Middle Ages, and they are Jews, British-Israelite rightist nonsense to the contrary. (Of course, modern Zionists do not understand this religious principle any more than do their British-Israelite critics. Both conceive of everything in terms of blood and race.) So then, it is spurious to criticize Zionism on the grounds that "Jews really didn't suffer during World War II," or "Who knows who the real Jews are?" It is pretty obvious who the Jews are, and they are, as always, a force to be reckoned with. The third line of criticism against Zionism concerns the rightness or wrongness of its invasion and conquest of Palestine. We can listen to arguments to the effect that the Jews stole the land from its inhabitants, that they have persecuted the Palestinians, that they committed horrors during their guerrilla campaign, and the like. Then we can listen to arguments that say that the Jews in Palestine were mistreated under Moslem rule, that the Palestinians are better off today under enlightened Jewish government than they formerly were, that the Jews have exercised dominion over the land and the Moslems did not, thereby forfeiting their right to it, and the like. Actually, none of this is any of our direct concern as Christians. As

Christians we see both Jews and Moslems as groups that have rejected Christ as Messiah, and who have opposed the true faith. If they want to convert, we rejoice. If they want to kill each other off, then that is too bad, but let them have at it – there's nothing we can do about it.

But then, that brings us to the issue: Are Bible-believing Christians supposed to support a Jewish State, for theological reasons? Such is the assertion of Jerry Falwell, and of the heresy of Christian Zionism. Let us turn to this doctrine.

### **Orthodox Dispensationalism versus Christian Zionism**

During the nineteenth century, a peculiar doctrinal notion known as "dispensationalism" arose. Its leading lights were Darby and Scofield; its Bible was the Scofield Reference Bible; and in recent years its primary headquarters has been Dallas Theological Seminary. Technically, dispensationalism teaches that God has two peoples in the history of the world: Israel and the "Church." We presently live in the "Church Age," and God's people today are Christians, the Church. At the present time, the Jews are apostate enemies of God and of Christ, and are under God's judgment until they repent. Someday soon (It's always soon!), Christ will return to earth invisibly and snatch away all the Church-Christians (this is called the "Rapture" of the saints). At that point, God will go back to dealing with Israel. There will be a seven-year period called "The Tribulation," and during that period, apostate Jewry will form an anti-God alliance with the Beast, but God will begin to convert the Jews, and in time the Beast will turn and begin to persecute these converted Jews. Just when things look hopeless, Christ will return and inaugurate the Millennium. One other point to note: There are absolutely no signs that the Rapture of the Church is near. It will come "as a thief in the night." Now, this entire scheme, though popular in recent years, has no roots in historic Christian interpretation of the Scriptures, and at present it is collapsing under the weight of criticism from Bible-believing scholars of a more historically orthodox persuasion. All the same, there are several things to note. First, by teaching that there are no signs that precede the Rapture, dispensationalism clearly implies that the modern State of Israel has nothing to do with Bible prophecy. If Israel collapsed tomorrow, it would make no difference. The existence of the State of Israel, while it may encourage dispensationalists to believe that the Rapture is near, is of no theological prophetic importance. Second, dispensationalism teaches that Jews of today, and even into the Tribulation period, are apostate, and this certainly implies that they are under the wrath and judgment of God. Christians should minister to them, and try to convert them, and show them all kindness as fellow human beings; but Christians should understand that during the Church Age, the Jews are not the people of God. Rather, the Church is the people of God today.

Third, by teaching that Israel is "set aside" during the Church Age, dispensationalism clearly implies that the promises made to Israel are also "set aside" during that period. The land promise, and the promise "those who bless you, I will bless:" have been set aside, until we re-enter "prophetic time." Thus, the Jews have no right to the land during the Church Age, and also there is no particular blessing for Gentiles who treat the Jews with especial favor. Fourth, dispensational theologians are most strict on the point that the Church is a "new people," composed as one body in Christ of both Jew and Gentile. During the Church Age, the distinction between these two is not to be felt in the Church.

Thus, dispensational theology is, by implication, opposed to the kind of standpoint articulated in many "Messianic Jewish" groups. What I am setting forth is standard, consistent dispensationalism. As far as I am concerned, dispensationalism is sorely wrong in its prophetic view, but it is at least orthodox in its view of salvation and blessing. Blessing comes to the Jews when they repent and accept Christ; until then, they are under God's curse. How can it be otherwise? All blessings are in Christ. This is the teaching of orthodox Christianity, and Darby and the early dispensationalists were orthodox Christians on this point, as far as I can tell.

### **Jerry Falwell and Christian Zionism**

My description of dispensationalism may seem rather strange, because this is not the teaching of Hal Lindsey, of the modern Dallas Theological Seminary, or of other modern dispensationalists. I call these people "pop-dispies," for short. In contrast to the dispensational system, these people hold that God presently has two peoples on the earth: the Church and Israel. The consistent dispensational system teaches that there are no prophecies whose fulfillment takes place during the Church Age, because the Church exists outside of prophetic time, but modern pop-dispies teach that the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 was a fulfillment of prophecy. Consistent dispensationalism teaches that God is dealing with His "heavenly" people today (the Church), and that during the Church Age, God has "set aside" His apostate "earthly" people (Israel). Pop-dispies, on the contrary, hold that even though apostate, Israel still must be regarded as being under God's present blessing. They hold the heretical notion that the Jews do not need to repent in order to obtain the blessings of God's covenant. They hold the unBiblical notion that apostate Jewry is not today under the wrath of God. A well-known advocate of this unfortunate position is the Rev. Jerry Falwell. A modern Zionist, Merrill Simon, has recognized this fact, and has written a book, *Jerry Falwell and the Jews*. This book is a series of interviews with Rev. Falwell, designed to present him as a friend of Zionism, and to alleviate suspicions that liberal Zionist Jews naturally have when it comes to a supposedly orthodox, fundamental Christian preacher. I should like to cite some quotations from this book, and make some appropriate comments. The book says, however, "No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written consent from the publishers," which rather cramps my style. You'll just have to believe me, as I summarize Falwell's comments. You can always go to your local library and look it up for yourself. On page 13, Falwell is asked if he considers the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as a sign of God's rejection of Israel. Falwell answers by saying that he surely does not believe a "vengeful" God brought the Roman army to Jerusalem to destroy the Jews. Falwell ascribes the event rather to anti-Semitism. Now let's hear what the Bible says about it. We needn't quote Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 in their entirety. Read them at your leisure, and ask this question: Do we see an angry, "vengeful" God here threatening to bring horrors upon Israel if they apostatize? Also read [Psalm 69:21](#) and ask Whom this refers to, and then continue reading until the end of the Psalm, remembering that the Romans surrounded Jerusalem at Passover time. Notice [Psalm 69:25](#) speaks of the "desolation" of Jerusalem, and consider that in connection with Jesus' pronouncement of the desolation of Jerusalem in [Matthew 23:38](#). Falwell is completely out of line with Scripture on this point. On page 25, Falwell says that he believes anti-Semitism is inspired exclusively by Satan, as part of his opposition to God. Against this, read Job

chapters 1 and 2. Here we find that Satan is never allowed to do anything without God's permission. Moreover, we find from the rest of the Bible that God frequently raises up enemies against His people, as scourges to punish them. Read the Book of Judges. Read Kings and Chronicles about Assyria and Babylon. Read Habakkuk. This is not some minor point tucked away in some obscure passage. Rather, this truth pervades the entire Scriptures. It is true that anti-Jewish feelings are not part of the Christian message, and that Christians should be as considerate toward Jews as they are toward all other men. It is also true, however, that it is God Who stirs up the Babylonians and Assyrians. Until the Jews repent and convert (as Romans 11 promises that someday they shall), they remain God's enemies, and He does stir up pagans against them. Anti-Jewishness has been part and parcel of secular humanism from the time of Frederick II, through the Renaissance, down to today. The Christian church protected the Jews throughout the Middle Ages, and has continued to do. On page 55, Falwell says that Jews and Christians may differ at some points, but they have a common heritage in the Old Testament. Would Falwell be willing to say the same to a Moslem? At any rate, the statement is incorrect. Judaism looks to the Talmud, not to the Bible, as its law. It shows extreme ignorance of Judaism, medieval or modern, to think that Christians can appeal to the Old Testament as common ground. Judaism never approaches the Bible except through the Talmud. On page 62, Falwell says that the future of the State of Israel is more important than any other political question. He says that the Jews have a theological, historical, and legal right to Palestine. He affirms his personal commitment to Zionism, and says that he learned Zionism from the Old Testament. The Bible teaches us that when Adam and Eve rebelled, they lost their right to the Garden, and God cast them out. God used the very same principle with Israel, giving them the land, but warning them over and over again that if they rebelled, they would be cast out. It is beyond me how Falwell can read the Old Testament Scriptures and fail to see this. Modern apostate Jews have absolutely no theological, and therefore no historical and legal right to the land of Palestine. The church of all ages has always taught that the New Testament equivalent of the "land" is the whole world, in Christ, and ultimately the New Earth. God's people, Christ-confessors, are given the whole earth, in principle, and progressively will take dominion over it in time. Even if dispensationalism were correct in its assertion that some-day the land of Palestine will be given back to the Jews, we should still have to say that they must convert to Christ first! On page 68, Falwell says that one thing in modern Israel disturbs him. It is that Christians do not have the liberty to evangelize for the gospel. In other words, Falwell is aware that Christians are being persecuted in Israel today, but he still supports Israel! If this is not a betrayal of the faith, what is? Finally, on p. 145, Falwell is asked about abortion, since modern Jews advocate abortion. Simon asks him whether or not the death penalty should be used against a woman who has an abortion, and her

physician. Falwell replies that he has never thought about this before, and that he thinks any action against the woman would be wrong. Well, there we see it. Mr. Simon knows what the issues really are, but Rev. Falwell is so confused, befuddled, and blind that he cannot see them. Obviously, if abortion is murder, then we have to advocate the death penalty for it! Of course, Falwell here sounds just like most of the rest of the modern anti-abortion movement: They've never even thought about some of the most basic, elementary issues involved. "Abortion is murder," they cry. "Reinstitute the death

penalty for murder," says the Moral Majority (Falwell's political group). Anybody with an IQ over 25 can figure out the implications of these two state-ments, but apparently Falwell has never thought of this before. We live in sorry times, when such a novice is the spokesman for the New Christian Right ! Christian Zionism is blasphemy. It is a heresy. Christians have no theological stake whatsoever in the modern State of Israel. It is an anti-God, anti-Christ nation. Until it repents and says "blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord: it will continue to be under the wrath of God. The modern State of Israel permits the persecution of Christians and Christian missionaries. We must pray that God will change the hearts of Jews, as of all other pagans, to receive Christ. But to support the enemies of the Gospel is not the mark of a Gospel minister, but of an anti-Christ. I've been pretty hard on Jerry. Somebody needs to be. This kind of thing is inexcusable, and needs to be repented of. A couple of years ago I wrote an essay defending Falwell against a somewhat liberal critic.' What I have said here does not change what I wrote then, because Falwell's critic was wrong; but I have certainly come to take a dimmer view of Mr. Falwell since. His trumpet is giving forth an un-certain sound. He needs to clean it out.

Messianic Judaism In recent years, a large number of Jewish young people have turned to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Many of these young people have formed "Messianic Synagogues," and have articulated here and there various theologies of "Messianic Judaism." For many, Messianic Judaism is simply a way of keeping some Jewish cultural traditions while becoming Christian, and there is nothing wrong with this. It is proper for Christians of various tribes and tongues to give expression to the faith in a variety of cultural forms. Unfortunately, for some, Messianic Judaism is seen as an alternative to historic Christianity. This is due to the influence of pop-dispyism. After all, if the Millennium is right around the corner, and Jewish culture will be imperialistically triumphant during the Millennium, then even today Jewish practices anticipate that superiority. In fact, some Messianic Jews apparently believe that they can claim unlimited financial support from Gentile Christians, because of this preeminence. 8

Most of what I have written regarding Christian Zionism above applies to this group of Messianic Jews. I should like, however, to call attention to another facet of the matter. These Messianic Jews believe wrongly that Gentile Christianity (the historic church) departed from Biblical forms in the early days of the church. They see as their mission a restoration of these customs, which they believe they have pre-served.

In fact, this is completely false. Anyone who has seen a presentation of "Christ in the Passover" is amazed at the number of non-Biblical rites that are discussed and exhibited (the use of eggs, bread broken in three pieces and hidden in cloth, etc.). These customs arose after the birth of the church, and do not preserve Old Testament ritual at all. Moreover, to try to place a Christian interpretation on the various features of these rituals is most misguided and artificial. Clever as such presentations are, they are grossly misleading. As a matter of fact, the leading features of Temple and Synagogue worship were brought straight into the church, as she spoiled the new enemies of God: apostate Jewry. The period of this spoiling was A.D. 30 to A.D. 70. Once the church had completed her integration of the spoils of the Old Covenant into her new, transfigured body, God de-destroyed the remnants of the Old Covenant completely. Modern Jewish

rituals and music owe far more to racial/cultural inheritance from the peoples of Eastern Europe than they do to the Old Covenant.

Thus, while there is nothing wrong with converted Jews maintaining a cultural continuity with their past, there are no grounds for the assumption that post-Christian Jewry has preserved the musical and liturgical forms of the Bible. Those forms were preserved in the church, and in her alone. Jews who wish to recover their heritage would do well to study the early Church, not the traditions of Eastern European cultures.

#### Footnotes:

Reprinted from James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1986).

1. On the former aspect, see Ronald Sanders, *The High Walk of Jerusalem: A History of the Balfour Declaration and the Birth of the British Mandate for Palestine* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1984).
2. Lilienthal has authored several books on this subject. His magnum opus is *The Zionist Connection* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1978).
3. On the Khazars, see Arthur Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe* (New York: Random House, 1976).
4. British-Israelitism claims that the Anglo-Saxon people are the true Jews, and thus inherit the covenant promises by means of race alone. This weird, stupid idea is promoted by the Armstrong cult, but also crops up in right wing Christian circles. For a fine analysis and refutation of this viewpoint, see Louis F. DeBoer, *The New Phariseism* (Columbus, NJ: The American Presbyterian Press, 1978).
5. Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1984.
6. On the church's protection of the Jews, see Harold J. Berman (himself a Jew), *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1983), pp. 90,222.
7. See my essay, "The Moral Majority: An Anabaptist Critique," in James B. Jordan, ed. *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture, Christianity and Civilization No. 1* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1982).
8. See Gary North, "Some Problems with 'Messianic Judaism,'" in *Biblical Economics Today* 7:3 (Apr./May, 1984).
9. Louis Bouyer has shown at considerable length that the Eucharistic prayer of the early church was a modification of the prayers of the Synagogue and Temple. See Bouyer, *Eucharist* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1968). Similarly, Eric Werner has shown that the plainchant of the Christian church preserves the style of music known among the Jews of the Old Testament period. See Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (Columbia U. Press, 1959; the paperback by Schocken only reproduces the first half of this important study).